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Former BBB official pleads guilty to lying about car to FBI

The Plain Dealer - Cleveland, Ohio

Author: KAREN HENDERSON

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Document Text

A former Better Business Bureau official, who claimed he was being harassed by a Beachwood psychologist he was investigating, pleaded guilty yesterday to lying to the FBI about being followed by a car licensed to the psychologist's wife.

James M. Sutter, 34, of Lakewood, a former BBB trade specialist, appeared before U.S. District Judge George W. White, after being charged earlier in the day.

Sutter admitted he lied about the car and told White he had become "over- zealous" in his pursuit of the investigation of Dr. Edward LaMonte Ohlson. Ohlson is under federal investigation in connection with an advance-fee loan scam involving millions of dollars.

Sutter claimed he was followed by someone in a white Corvette on three occasions and gave the license number of the car to the FBI, which found it belonged to Ohlson's wife.

When FBI agents investigated the complaint, they found Ohlson's Corvette was inoperable and had been sitting for a long time, according to an FBI report.

Sutter was suspended by the BBB and forced to resign on Aug. 13 because of the pending charges, an investigator said.

Assistant U.S. Attorney James V. Moroney said the FBI also is investigating whether Sutter may have sent threatening letters to himself, which he claimed were from Ohlson, and whether a burglary of the BBB offices in May, after which Sutter claimed part of Ohlson's file was stolen, really occurred.

Moroney said the letters received in April, May and June have been turned over to an FBI handwriting expert.

Ohlson, 45, was charged in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court in May with intimidating Sutter in connection with the letters. Ohlson has denied sending Sutter the letters or intimidating him. Ohlson's trial is pending.

Sutter faces up to five years in jail and a \$250,000 fine for lying to the FBI.

Ohlson, a Canadian citizen who lives in South Russell, has been under investigation by the BBB for two years. The investigation was headed by Sutter.

According to their investigation, Ohlson posed as an honorary consul to Canada from Sierra Leone, a republic in West Africa. He allegedly used phony credentials to convince at least 30 people that he could obtain loans in return for a fee. The loans were never obtained.

Among the complaints against Ohlson was one from two businessmen who claimed Ohlson took a \$17,500 advance fee from each of four investors and promised to get them a \$10 million loan which would be underwritten by Sierra Leone. They never received the loan.

Canadian officials claimed they had never heard of Ohlson, and Sierra Leone officials denied he ever held a consular position with them.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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